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Senate Committee on
Armed Services

STATEMENT OF SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MELVIN R. LAIRD
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
ON THE BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEM

20 March 1969

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a pleasure to be with you today as Secretary of Defense. Our presentation is designed to assist this Committee and the Congress in fulfilling your responsibility as a key part of the National decision-making process.

The anti-missile Defense question is certainly one of the most important decisions we have faced in modern times because it affects the safety and security of the American people.

Peace is not only our goal, Mr. Chairman. It is our solemn responsibility. The Safeguard System which President Nixon announced last week is designed to contribute toward peace.

It is not an escalation of the arms race.

It is not a stumbling block to arms limitation talks.

Safeguard is a building block for peace.

The purpose of my remarks is to explain why we hold these views and why we urge the Congress to support the President's decision. Deputy Secretary David Packard will discuss the Safeguard program and the

nature of the threat in greater detail upon the conclusion of my remarks.

Safeguard -- Not an Escalation of the Arms Race

The modified ABM system has been designed so that its defensive intent is unmistakable. It is not an escalation of the arms race. The original Sentinel Plan could have been interpreted as a first step toward the construction of a heavy system toward the defense of our cities. Indeed, it could have been used for that purpose.

The Safeguard System -- both in fact and in appearance -- is a protection for our retaliatory forces. It is an essential safeguard for United States interests because of the nature of the threat we face from the Soviet Union and Red China.

The potential threat from the Soviet Union lies in the growing force of missiles which could destroy a portion of our own deterrent, or retaliatory forces. We cannot stop a massive Soviet attack on our cities; technically we just don't know how. We must rely on deterrence to insure that nuclear war doesn't start in the first place. In order to deter an attack we must be positive -- and the Soviet government must be positive -- that a substantial number of our long range missiles and bombers will survive any attack and then destroy the attacker as a modern society. The Soviet Union today is building at a rapid rate the kinds of weapons which could be used to erode our essential deterrent force.

They are installing many SS-9 InterContinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM's) -- a large and accurate weapon. With improvements in accuracy and a continued increase in numbers, the Soviet missile force could gain real effectiveness against our MINUTEMAN. The Soviets also can build nuclear submarines at a rate of one per month which could come close to our shores and attack at short-range many of our missiles and bomber bases. They are also working hard on FOBS, a Fractional Orbit Bombardment System, also designed to reduce the warning time to our bombers so that they will not have sufficient time to become airborne.

Communist China is another potential threat to us. It cannot threaten our retaliatory weapons systems for many years but, by the mid-1970's, China could pose a threat to our people and our property. The Government of Communist China is devoting an astonishing portion of its limited national resources to the development of nuclear weapons and ICBM's.

The Safeguard System proposed by President Nixon is carefully designed to meet these threats adequately without overreacting.

Continuing research and development without any initial deployment would leave us with no option to provide defense for our deterrent on the schedule that might be required by the Soviet threat if we do not reach an agreement with the Soviets on limiting strategic forces.

Under the new concept of phased and measured installation, we give added insurance that our ballistic missile defense will be adequate but not wasteful. If further threats do not develop, we can stop the

installation with the two sites that will be constructed under phase one of our program. If either the Soviet or Chinese threat continues to grow, we can meet the threat with added installations.

Our obviously thin protection of cities and added protection of our deterrent forces will require no reaction at all from the Soviet Union -- providing the Soviet Union has a responsible, deterrent nuclear war policy, as we do.

Safeguard - Not a Stumbling Block to Arms Limiting Talks

Mr. Chairman, the Safeguard System is not a stumbling block to arms limiting talks with the Soviet Union. On the contrary; under the type of deployment we have chosen, the Soviet Union is given an added incentive to negotiate a meaningful agreement on limitation of both offensive and defensive weapons. First, the modified ABM program would show the Soviets that we are quite serious about protecting our deterrent forces -- about assuring all enemies that they cannot achieve an effective, low-risk, first strike against the United States. Second, it would show the Soviets that we are not preparing for a low-risk attack on them and that it is worthwhile to negotiate limits on strategic arms.

Under the proposed Safeguard program, even the first two installations will not be operating before 1973. This gives ample time for the two countries to negotiate agreements on these and other weapons. Thus, the modified ABM opens the door wider to mutual arms control.

But if the Soviets should slam the door on an agreement, the modified ABM would permit us to continue steps toward protection of our retaliatory forces. This option would be more important than ever before, because we would have to assume that a Soviet rejection of meaningful negotiations would demonstrate a Soviet determination to continue to build toward a low-risk first-strike force.

The public Soviet reaction to the President's announcement of a week ago is encouraging, however. The Soviet press indicates that the Soviet Government correctly views the modified ABM as a purely defensive weapon.

Safeguard - A Building Block for Peace

Mr. Chairman, the system we are proposing is the best kind of people protection because it strengthens our ability to deter nuclear war. To the extent that it does that, it can truly be called a building block for peace.

Our studies showed that while we could not defend our cities effectively against a massive attack -- only a small one -- we could defend our MINUTEMAN missiles and bombers to a significant degree against any size of threat. The problems here are different. In defending cities, our minimum objective must be to intercept all incoming warheads. If one gets through, the city and most of its people are destroyed. But in the case of our MINUTEMAN missiles and our alert bombers, we do not have to preserve every one of them. We must preserve only a certain

the minimum essential number -- enough to guarantee immense destruction in the aggressor's own country.

This, the Safeguard Anti-Ballistic Missile System, has the capability to provide -- both for the immediate threat and for whatever threat emerges in the decade of the 1970's.

In providing a safeguard for our retaliatory forces under the program we have recommended, we provide ourselves with the option of protecting our people against the Communist Chinese ICBM threat, should it materialize.

The Safeguard System is a building block for peace because it meets the following requirements.:

1. It clearly rejects a provocative expansion into a heavy defense of our cities against a Soviet attack;
2. It offers more protection, as needed, to our deterrent forces;
3. It offers protection, as needed, of the entire country, from a small attack;
4. It offers the Soviet Union added incentive for productive arms control talks; and
5. It provides the protection needed for the safety and security of our country -- but only the protection needed.

In summary I want to say that my technical advisors are convinced and have convinced me that this limited ballistic missile defense is feasible, Mr. Packard, the Service Secretaries, the Joint Chiefs of

Staff and I agree, unanimously, that the recommended program will be adequate, will be timely, and will be the appropriate counter to the threat. We recommended the Safeguard Program to the President and we recommend it unanimously to you.

Mr. Packard is now prepared to go into the details of the Safeguard Program, Mr. Chairman.